

**SUMMARY OF THE
OPENING PLENARY MEETING
JULY 09, 2002**

The Opening Plenary of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) met on Tuesday, July 9, 2002, at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) as part of the Eighth Annual NELAC Meeting in Tampa, Florida. The meeting was led by NELAP Director, Jeanne Hankins, of the USEPA/ORD. A list of participants is given in Attachment A. Participants' presentations are given in Attachments B, C and D. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss agenda items, which follow.

INTRODUCTION

Ms. Hankins welcomed attendees and gave various announcements concerning the Conference. She then introduced the Board members and the Committee Chairs.

A WALK DOWN MEMORY LANE BY DR. CHARLES HARTWIG

A Walk Down Memory Lane by Dr. Charles Hartwig

Ms. Labie, the Chair of the NELAC Board of Directors, introduced Dr. Charles Hartwig, NELAC Chair Emeritus. Dr. Hartwig began his talk by describing his involvement with NELAC. Dr. Hartwig, who was one of the early pioneers of NELAC, served as chair of the Program, Policy and Structure Standing Committee and the second Chair of the NELAC Board of Directors.

He provided the conference with the history of how NELAC became a reality. In the late 1980's several health-related organizations expressed the need to have a set of national standards for environmental testing. Dr. Hartwig was involved in these early discussions, since he was an active member in CLIA. In 1990, the Environmental Monitoring Management Council (EMMC) within EPA formed a workgroup to consider the feasibility of a national accreditation program. Dr. Hartwig was invited to provide input to this group.

Subsequent to the EMMC findings, EPA established a committee under the Federal Advisory Committee Act with the name of the Committee for National Accreditation of Environmental Laboratories in 1991. This committee represented interests from the Federal, State, laboratory community and several interest private sector organizations. Dr. Hartwig was the Vice-Chair of CNEAL as they evaluated the need and feasibility of a national environmental laboratory certification program.

In May, 1993, a focus group composed of EPA, Federal and State representatives began meeting to develop laboratory accreditation standards. Again, Dr. Hartwig took an active role in chairing the Program, Policy and Structure committee that was formed from focus group members.

In February 1994, the first NELAC conference was held in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Hartwig sees the growth from CNAEL to NELAP as a miracle – and an achievement that has been accomplished because of the dedication, work and vision of those involved in the process.

Keynote Address by Mr. Edward Conklin

Ms. Labie introduced the keynote speaker, Mr. Ed Conklin, Director of Resource Assessment and Management Division for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. He has been with the DEP and other Florida agencies for 26 years and has served in a number of senior management and scientific positions with the Departments of Community Affairs, Environmental Regulation, and the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission. He has a Master Degree in environmental science from the University of Florida and is a native of Dade County, Florida.

Mr. Conklin welcomed everyone to Florida and wished them a successful conference. He proceeded to explain the purpose and responsibilities of the DEP and how the data generated by laboratories affect the decisions that are made. Mr. Conklin used examples of places in Florida, such as Tampa and Saint Petersburg that have a long history of urban and coastal development that have resulted in negative impacts on the environment. The DEP, through regulations and permits, has brought these areas through a long process of environmental recovery, including improved water flow, sea grass resurgence, rebounding fisheries and swimmable waterways.

The DEP views NELAC and NELAP as critical to help ensure that the data the Department receives is accurate and representative so that appropriate environmental decisions can be made. NELAC, with regulations and information management, are keys to a successful, positive environmental future.

ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD (AARB) REPORT BY MS. JUDY DUNCAN

Ms. Duncan, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and Chair of the AARB, proceeded with her presentation on activities of the AARB. The key points discussed during her presentation include:

- AARB General Operations
- Appeals
- Monitoring of NELAP
- Recommendations from 2000 – 2001

The details of her presentation may be reviewed in Attachment C.

NELAP ACCREDITING AUTHORITIES REPORT BY MR. STEVE ARMS

Mr. Arms, Florida Department of Health and member of the NELAP AAs, presented the Accrediting Authority Work Group Report. The key points discussed during his presentation included:

- Accrediting Authorities Initiatives and Accomplishments
- AA Workgroup - What Are We?

- AA Workgroup - What Are We Not?
- Proficiency Testing
- On-Site Assessment
- Accreditation
- Technical
- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?

The details of his presentation may be reviewed in Attachment D.

SETTING THE STAGE BY MS. SILKY LABIE

Setting the Stage by Ms. Silky Labie

Ms. Labie welcomed the attendees to the conference and provided a brief summary of the NELAC process – a process that has evolved into many successful and noteworthy working relationships between the public and private participants. She then proceeded to set the stage for the conference activities. The full text of her remarks are found in Attachment E.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Labie thanked the attendees for coming and wished them a successful conference.

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JULY 09, 2002**

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ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD (AARB)

Annual Report and Functions

July 2002

ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD (AARB)
Annual Report and Functions

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Introduction to the Report of the Accrediting Authority Review Board

At the beginning of the third year of the Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB) a list of Future Plans of Action was developed for use in guiding AARB activities. This list included the following.

1. Review NELAC standards to see where AARB was mentioned and compare to the Charter.
2. Audit NELAP performance for the two-year Accrediting Authority (AA) renewal cycle.
3. Review Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed for and by NELAP.
4. Track progress of NELAP development of a records retention policy and its implementation.
5. Audit the NELAP process for approval of any new AAs.
6. Review time frames for AA approval and renewals.
7. Handle any appeals to the AARB.

A review of AARB activities will show that all seven items were addressed.

In preparing this AARB Annual Report, we have prepared consolidated listings of Policies and Procedures adopted by the AARB (Attachment A) and a summary of past AARB recommendations to the NELAP Director and NELAC Board of Directors (Attachment B).

AARB Annual Report and Functions

A. AARB GENERAL OPERATIONS

Revision of the Charter

Prior to reviewing the AARB Charter, AARB reviewed NELAC standards to determine if changes to the standards necessitated changes to the Charter and determined that none did. The AARB recommended to the NELAP Director that the language in the Section 3, Duties and Scope of Activities, be revised to reflect that the AARB conducts annual “process for recognizing AAs rather than “audits” of this process. The revised language of the Charter is included in this report as Attachment C.

BUSINESS MEETINGS

The AARB met at the NELAC 7 and 7i meetings and conducted a number of conference call meetings. As included in the AARB Policy and Procedure for Business Meetings, the NELAP Director was consulted on recommended changes to the Charter and on other items of business during the year.

AARB ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION OF CHAIR AND SECRETARY

At present, the AARB members and officers include the following:

- George Mills, Term end 2002
- Judy Duncan, Chair, Term end 2003
- Carol Madding, Secretary, Term end 2004
- Carl Kircher, Term end 2005
- Dan Hickman, Term end 2006

DOCUMENT CONTROL SYSTEM FOR AARB

The Document Control Policy and Procedure for AARB was revised to reflect that the permanent files for AARB would be maintained with the permanent files for NELAP.

DEVELOPMENT OF AARB QUALITY SYSTEM

After seeking input from attendees at the NELAC 7i AARB session, Dr. Carl Kircher of the AARB prepared a draft AARB Quality System based upon ISO 61. This draft system has been reviewed by AARB and will be presented for discussion and input at the AARB session of the NELAC 8 meeting.

FOLLOW-UP ON PREVIOUS AARB RECOMMENDATIONS

In the AARB 2000 Annual Report a recommendation was made that the NELAP program should document that there were no conflict of interest issues between individuals chosen to serve on a NELAP Evaluation Team and the Accrediting Authority that was to be reviewed. In order to facilitate implementation of this recommendation, AARB reviewed Chapter 6 and determined that conflicts of interest were addressed for AAs and the laboratories that they audit but were not addressed for NELAP staff and the AAs that they audit. AARB recommended the following language to the Chapter 6, Accrediting Authority, Committee to address this issue:

6.9.1 NELAP Evaluation Team

...
(e) The NELAP evaluation team shall:

- ...
- (3) Be free from conflict of interest that would compromise acting in impartial nondiscriminatory manners.
 - (4) ~~(3)~~ All experience required...

B. APPEALS

No NELAP decisions were appealed to the AARB during the time period covered by this report.

C. MONITORING OF NELAP

AARB ASSESSMENT OF NELAP ACCREDITING AUTHORITY RECOGNITION PROCESS

The On-Site Assessment Report for the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality was reviewed by AARB using the procedure established for earlier reviews (see Attachment A). The AARB found that there was sufficient documentation to perform this review and that the documentation was comparable to previous On-Site Assessment documentation. This NELAP assessment held to the established time frames for completion somewhat better than past initial assessments. As was the case in past reviews, the AARB found that the narrative that accompanies the check sheet for the On-Site Assessment should be more descriptive in order to facilitate a determination that On-Site Assessments are conducted to the same level of detail. For example, rather than simply stating that a check sheet item was met, the Assessment Team should describe how the item was met or cite the AA reference for where it was met (i.e., SOP 24, Section 1, Paragraph 2).

AARB Review of NELAP Requests to Extend Time for Accrediting Authority Renewal Process

This was an interim year for Accrediting Authorities to be reevaluated. Upon approval of the AARB, extensions of the renewal process may be granted. NELAP requested extensions of the time periods for completion of the renewal process for eight EPA Regions that conducted these reviews. Since this was the first round of renewals and the process was new to all participants, AARB adopted a liberal policy for granting each of these extensions. However, members of the AARB felt that we were put in a rubber stamp position and, while the overall problem was apparent, we did not always have sufficient criteria for granting each request individually. The AARB suggests that the role of AARB in granting time extensions be reviewed to determine if this is the appropriate body or if this function should rest with the NELAP Director.

AARB ASSESSMENT OF NELAP ACCREDITING AUTHORITY RENEWAL PROCESS

AARB was unable to review the NELAP Accrediting Authority Renewal Process because extensions were granted and the process was not completed in time for files to be consolidated and transmitted to AARB with sufficient time to accomplish this review before NELAC 8.

REVIEW OF NELAP SOPs AND DOCUMENTS

One of the AARB findings in the first report was that documentation was difficult to find since files were kept in the EPA Regions. The AARB recommended that all documentation be forwarded and kept in one place and Las Vegas, NV was chosen by NELAP. The AARB and NELAP Director discussed the need for an AARB on-site audit of NELAP files and the problem with funding for such an activity. Near the end of the year the NELAP Director advised AARB that this funding would be available. AARB will schedule an audit when the NELAP Director advises that consolidation of files has been completed.

No new NELAP SOPs or document formats were presented to AARB for review.

AARB Recommendation Concerning Time Lines for Accrediting Authority Review and Renewal Processes

The AARB has observed that there is a recurring problem with NELAP completing Accrediting Authority reviews and renewals within the time lines specified by the NELAC standards. This problem may be due in part to first time implementation of these processes. However, AARB believes that the timelines may not be realistic for the NELAP process, which involves Regional staff as reviewers. This comment is not intended as a criticism of that process, but merely as an acknowledgement that Regional staff may have many other duties in addition to NELAP reviews. AARB has recommended to the NELAP Director that timelines for AA review and renewal review be revisited and that recommendations regarding more realistic timelines be sought from AA states, EPA Regional staff involved in NELAP reviews and the ELAB. AARB believes that the NELAP process would have more integrity if timelines were realistic and could then be expected to be more rigidly observed.

ATTACHMENT A

ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD (AARB) POLICIES AND PROCEDURES June 2002

A. AARB GENERAL OPERATIONS

REVISION OF CHARTER REVIEW AND PROPOSE CHANGES DUE TO CHANGES IN CHAPTER 1 OF THE NELAC STANDARDS

1. Review and propose changes due to recommendations from the NELAP Director
2. Review proposed changes from other interested parties
3. Recommend changes, finalize and prepare for NELAP Director's approval

BUSINESS MEETINGS ANNUAL AND INTERIM

1. Conference calling
2. Meet with the NELAP Director at least twice for direction and updates
 - a. Seek from Director, NELAC standard changes which may affect AARB
 - b. Future changes in AARB duties
 - c. Open meetings schedule
 - d. Role of AARB communicated to NELAC by Director

AARB ANNUAL MEETING ELECTION OF CHAIR AND SECRETARY

As of May 2002:

George Mills, Term end 2002
Judy Duncan, Chair, Term end 2003
Carol Madding Secretary, Term end 2004
Carl Kirchner, Term end 2005
Dan Hickman, Term end 2006

DOCUMENT CONTROL SYSTEM FOR THE AARB DOCUMENTS

1. Final document: Footers: AARB and title of document on left, Date Effective on right
2. Draft document: draft in title, revision date
3. Font: Times New Roman
4. The permanent files for the AARB shall be maintained with NELAP permanent files

B. APPEALS

AARB APPEAL BOARD FUNCTIONS

1. When a review of an appealed NELAP decision is requested, this activity should take priority over any routine annual business except election of officers.
2. The groups who are interviewed during AARB review of an appeal should be asked for feedback on the process so that it can be continually improved.

Standard Operating Procedure for AARB Investigation of Appealed NELAP Decisions (revised January 13, 2001)

The Accrediting Authority Review Board is charged by charter and by NELAC standards with reviewing appeals of NELAP decisions. When the NELAP Director informs the AARB that an Accrediting Authority has appealed a decision, the AARB will have 90 days to make a recommendation to the NELAP Director. The following process will be followed by the AARB to investigate the appeal.

1. The Chair of the AARB will request that the NELAP Director provide copies of all pertinent correspondence to the members of the AARB. This material will be requested in electronic format, if possible.
2. The AARB will meet by conference call to review the written record and prepare separate lists of questions for both the NELAP Director and the appealing Accrediting Authority. These questions may include requests for additional written documentation.
3. When the lists of questions are finalized, the AARB Chair will transmit the lists to both the NELAP Director and the appealing Accrediting Authority by e-mail along with proposed dates for conference calls with the AARB.
4. The AARB will meet by conference call with the NELAP Director and the appealing Accrediting Authority. These conference calls will be held separately to afford each party the opportunity to discuss their position openly with the AARB. Both the NELAP Director and the appealing Accrediting Authority may involve whatever staff members they believe may be necessary to fully represent their position to the AARB. During these calls additional documentation may be requested.
5. The AARB will meet by conference call to review the results of the initial investigation and decide upon next steps that may include:
 - Further review of additional documentation and/or additional conference calls that may be separate with each party or three-way with the AARB and both parties
 - Interviews with Assessment Team members who were involved in inspections of the appealing Accrediting Authority
 - Visits to the appealing Accrediting Authority or the NELAP Director for more in-depth review of the issues under appeal
 - Suggestions to both parties for an informal resolution to the appeal, or
 - A written recommendation to the NELAP Director for resolution of the appeal.

C. Monitoring NELAP

REVIEW OF A PORTION OF ON-SITE ASSESSMENT REPORTS OF ACCREDITING AUTHORITIES

In order to ascertain if Accrediting Authorities were reviewed in a consistent manner, the AARB will review some or all of the reports generated by the review team. The following process will be used. The AARB shall request a list of AAs that were recognized in the previous year (since the last review). The list should include the names of the AAs requesting accreditation, the fields

of testing for which they wish to be recognized and the names of the team members who reviewed the AAs application and performed the on-site visit.

1. The Chair of the AARB shall request that the NELAP Director send copies of some or all of the final summary reports of the reviews to the Board.
2. Using the checklist, each member of the Board shall read the reports and note any inconsistencies among them.
3. The Board may request copies of the complete audit reports if it is deemed necessary.
4. If clarification or more information about an assessment is necessary, the AARB may choose to interview AA personnel or assessor team members. The interview could be done by conference call or in person. The AARB will decide whom they want to interview and one member of the team will contact the person(s) to arrange for a convenient time for all to talk.

Review of NELAP SOPs and Documents

To ensure that activities are in conformance with NELAC policies and that these policies are applied consistently and will continue to be applied consistently, the AARB has requested that NELAP develop SOPs to describe its administrative tasks. As they are developed the AARB will review these documents both for content and comprehensiveness.

REVIEW OF NELAP INTERNAL AUDIT

In the event that NELAP does internal audits of its program the AARB may review the procedures and practices which are used to conduct the internal audit. The in-house systems audit (by NELAP) would consist of reviewing the various aspects of the assessment and recognition activities. Checklists, which delineate the critical aspects of each area may be used during an internal audit and can serve to document all observations. AARB would review the QA plan and procedures used by NELAP when conducting an internal audit. At a minimum, the AARB suggests that the following topics be evaluated during the internal audit cycle:

Review Dates

Documentation of dates of internal reviews

Quality System Plan:

Approved/reviewed/present

Procedures for document control

Documentation of Procedures

Quality Control review:

Turn around times

Review of team reports

Review of questions from teams

Tracking of annual reviews and semiannual audits

Assessment report Receipt and Storage

Review Preparation

Final recognition/denial/revocation letters/communications

Audits:

External

- Tracking
- Checklists used
- Procedures used

Complaints:

- Review of complaints
- Review of appeals or other actions

Training:

- Assessor team training documentation review
- National program training reviews

Equipment and Resources:

- Personnel resources
- Budget resources
- Report to management.

Future:

- Future program needs and perceived impacts.

ATTACHMENT B

SUMMARY OF AARB RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from 2000

NELAP Accrediting Process

1. NELAP should develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) or SOPs to be used by Assessment Teams for document preparation and report format for Technical Assessments, Summary Reports and Final Recommendations regarding recognition of Accrediting Authorities.
2. NELAP should develop a record retention policy and procedure. Include how records can be retrieved and located from regions as well.
3. The AARB would like to review the NELAP formal record of decisions with the next review. The final record of decision should be included with the Summary Report Package.
4. NELAP should document the Conflict of Interest issues between the Assessment Team and the Accrediting Authority have been formally addressed.
5. Based on experience, NELAP should suggest timeline changes which will more closely reflect the actual time it will take to assess an Accrediting Authority under the NELAC standards.

REVOCATION PROCEDURE

When an action to revoke an Accrediting Authority's (AA) recognition is being either considered or is imminent it is suggested as a matter of procedure that the NELAP Director send a notice of intent to the AA with a short time (ten working days) to respond and resolve any misunderstandings.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2001

AARB Comments NELAP'S 2001 Documents

The NELAP Director asked the AARB to review several communications and documents as described below.

1. The AARB reviewed correspondence, which indicates that as a matter of procedure the NELAP Director is notifying AAs of possible revocation issues and asking for clarification and resolution prior to any revocation action.
2. The AARB reviewed the Cover letter for two year renewal of NELAP Accrediting Authorities, Standard Operating Procedure, Two Year Renewal of NELAP Accrediting Authorities (February 12, 2001), Application for two year renewal and Checklist to Determine Accrediting Authority Compliance revision 2, February 2001. The AARB was pleased to review these documents especially the first of SOPs. We found that the documents were more than adequate to get the renewal cycle started.

Comments: AARB advises that the 2000 recommendations it made be incorporated into the **Standard Operating Procedure, Two Year Renewal of NELAP Accrediting Authorities (February 12, 2001), before the renewal cycle is substantially completed.**

- a) Specify a list of documents/files to be created and where and in what form (i.e. hard copy or electronic file) they are to be kept (the Record).
- b) Specify what the Record should contain: NELAP renewal application checklist completed by AA; Documentation that checklist has been reviewed and cross-checked by the AA assessment team (i.e. how/where is the requirement met); Copies of AA internal audits; either copies or listings of the accredited laboratory records reviewed; copies of all correspondence related to Corrective Action, Responses/ Reports and a copy of the final record of determination to grant or deny recognition.
- c) Outline what should be in a final report to the Director and what the sections should contain (create report format).
- d) Suggest adding a column on the checklist for the NELAP Assessment team to document its review.
- e) Section C, 2, (7). AARB suggests that the wording be changed .../- Select a representative sample of files to review to reflect the work of all assessors. We recommend this change to insure that both small AAs and large AAs are reviewed in an equitable fashion.
- f) The record should also include requested changes to the fields of testing an AA is recognized.
- g) AARB is concerned that the timeline may not be adequate for renewal reviews to occur. For the NELAP Director: Specify either in this SOP or another where the record of final determination is kept and what will it contain.

ATTACHMENT C

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD CHARTER

1. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY. This Charter describes the roles and responsibilities of the NELAP Accreditation Authority Review Board (AARB). The Charter shall be reviewed each year at the NELAC Annual Meeting and revised as necessary by EPA.
2. OBJECTIVES. The AARB is established to provide advice to the NELAP Director, to perform an independent review of the EPA/NELAP's Accrediting Authority recognition process for consistent and appropriate application of the NELAC standards, and to serve as a review board where NELAP recognition is denied or revoked.
3. DUTIES AND SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES. The AARB is an advisory board that reports to the NELAP Director. In all cases, the Director makes the final decision. The AARB has responsibilities to:
 - ❖ monitor NELAP to assure that EPA is following the NELAC standards for recognizing accrediting authorities;
 - ❖ serve as a review board for accrediting authorities that have been denied NELAP recognition or have had such recognition revoked, providing advice to the NELAP Director;
 - ❖ report on its activities to the NELAC Board of Directors at each annual meeting;
 - ❖ conduct an annual ~~audit~~ review of the NELAP process for recognizing accrediting authorities in accordance with the appropriate NELAC standards,
 - reporting its findings at the general opening session of each NELAC annual meeting, and
 - providing the annual ~~audit~~ review for posting on the NELAC web site; and
 - ❖ provide advice on issues referred by the NELAP Director, which may include matters raised by entities other than the accrediting authorities.
4. COMPOSITION. The AARB is composed of five voting members and one non-voting member. Each member shall be appointed for a five-year term.
 - ❖ The non-voting member shall be a representative of the USEPA and appointed by the NELAP Director. The appointment should be rotated among the EPA Regions and EPA Headquarters.
 - ❖ The five voting members shall consist of one federal accrediting authority official and four members from either states, the Territories, the Possessions of the United States or the District of Columbia, accrediting authority officials, of which at least three must be from NELAP-recognized primary accrediting authorities.
 - The state accrediting authority officials should be from different EPA Regions.
 - The appointments must be made in such a manner that the correct mix of membership is maintained at all times. Any AARB member appointed prior to July 1, 1999 will remain an AARB member even though the correct mix of membership may not be attained until July 1, 2004.

- ❖ Appointments to the AARB are made by the NELAP Director after consultation with the NELAC Board of Directors. The Director will solicit nominees from the NELAC stakeholders and present them to Board of Directors. Nominations are to be submitted to the NELAP Director three months prior to the NELAC annual meeting.
- ❖ Voting members of the AARB shall not be NELAP staff, on the NELAC Board of Directors or a member of a NELAC standing committee. The AARB annually selects one of its members to serve as its chair. The AARB may establish subcommittees as it finds necessary to carry out its responsibilities. Such subcommittees will report back to the AARB.

5. MEETINGS. AARB will meet at least two times in person during the year at the NELAC annual meeting and at the interim meeting. Other meetings shall be held as needed.

Accrediting Authorities Initiatives and Accomplishments

AA Workgroup - What Are We?

- Coalition of Accrediting Authorities established for the purpose of sharing ideas, solving common problems, and promoting consistency
- Stakeholders
- Advocates

AA Workgroup - What Are We Not?

- A NELAC Committee
- Rule makers

Proficiency Testing

- Review of method/analyte numbering system
- Recommendation that RCRA-water acceptance criteria be established
- Agreement to require only FOPT's on PT Committee list and recommend list expansion
- Sub-group for review of PTOB/PTPA issues
- Proposed language for NELAC 8

On-Site Assessment

- QS and method-specific checklists
- Development and submittal of OSA SOP
- On-going efforts to improve consistency

Accreditation

- Re-commitment to meet deadlines
- Secondary AA issues
 - Loss of accreditation
 - Multiple primaries
- Applicability of accredited methods

Technical

- Reporting of batch QC
- Calibration
- Preservation checks of Micro samples
- Measurement uncertainty

Where are we now?

- 982 NELAP laboratories listed with primary accreditation
 - + 272 since NELAC 7
 - + 348 since startup
- 407 listed with secondary
 - + 301 since NELAC 7
 - + 392 since startup

Where are we going?

- Adoption of the next set of standards
 - 2001 or 2002?
- Continued implementation
 - Balancing the needs of laboratories against resources and regulations
- On-going efforts toward internal and nationwide consistency

**OPENING PLENARY
OPENING REMARKS BY SILKY LABIE**

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ACCREDITATION CONFERENCE
EIGHTH ANNUAL MEETING
TAMPA, FLORIDA
JULY 09-12, 2002**

The current standards development and acceptance process has worked well for NELAC for the past eight years, and others have recognized the successful working relationships that have been developed between the voting sector and the contributors. In fact, the consensus-building team spirit is the key to NELAC's success.

EPA has been our parent – nurturing us, providing conference support and guidance. In fact, NELAC, as an organization may be only eight years old, but concept was discussed in many venues dating back to the 1990's.

We are on the verge of adolescence, an analogy that has been used many times since last December. As teens, we need to become more independent. EPA may be our mentor, but there are many critical activities and services that NELAC, as we are currently configured, cannot support. Many of these are considered vital to NELAC's continued growth and success.

But these activities require funding and NELAC must find sources to help fund some of these critical activities, instead of relying on EPA as a sole source of monetary support. In other words, NELAC must work towards self-sustainability.

So there we are – at the beginning of the “Wonder Years”. For those of you that are familiar with this television show that aired in the 1990's you will see many parallels between the preteen star of the show and NELAC's growth. There have been happy times and exhilarating moments as we passed significant miles stones, but there are also moments of agony, trauma, despair and uncertainty.

We have had our share of triumphs.

- There are approximately 1000 laboratories that proudly display the NELAP logo. We caught the attention of the Environmental Council of States (ECOS) who will shortly issue a statement in support of NELAC, and stress the important role that we play in environmental decisions.
- The number of NELAP accrediting authorities is growing. Texas and Virginia are on the verge of applying for recognition. The EPA application for NELAP recognition is in its final stages.

- We will also be forming an *ad hoc* committee to work through and find solutions for the concerns and difficulties that smaller organizations might encounter when beginning to implement the NELAC standards.

But in addition to these accomplishments, NELAC has encountered times of uncertainty. Last December, the interim meeting was convened amid questions and rumors about EPA support and private sector participation. These concerns overshadowed the routing conference activities. The result was an assignment to the Transition Committee to:

- Explore opportunities and avenues that will allow NELAC to become self-sustaining so that we can begin to support some of the conference activities;
- Find creative mechanisms to provide our private sector partners with equal input into the standards development process; and
- Accomplish the first two objectives in a manner that would cause the least disruption to the current NELAC process.

While this assignment appears to have conflicting objectives, I felt confident that a workable solution was possible. The Transition and Program, Policy and Structure Committees have been working together since last December, holding bi-weekly teleconferences and face-to-face meetings. I believe they have constructed a plausible and viable solution.

Their proposal does mean, however, that NELAC must be restructured. Because their proposal has an impact on the NELAC organizational structure, the Board felt that the focus of the entire conference should be on the proposed changes. That is why Transition and Program, Policy and Structure are meeting in joint session immediately after the conclusion of this plenary session.

I ask each of you to listen to and consider very carefully what the committees will be proposing, and what the impact might be to you and the organization you represent. Offer suggestions as comments on the proposed process.

Do remember, that there are some additional important issues to be addressed this year: incorporation of the ISO 17025 standard in the Quality System Chapter, and a new standard for field organizations.

This will be a busy week. I know that many of you have taken advantage of the short courses that were held on Sunday and Monday, and there are many other meetings and activities planned.

Now, it is time to stop wondering about what the future holds, and to begin taking responsibility of shaping our own future. Remember – we're growing up.